

Green County ATC: growing through community partnerships

At a time when needs are many and funds are few, it takes innovative thinking to move forward in education. That's a concept Green County Area Technology Center (ATC) principal Linda Floyd fully embraces.

Floyd inherited solid traditional Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, but they came with a budget that limited expansion and partnerships with local industries in need of high-quality employees.

"We have automotive technology, health sciences, wood technology, business technology, marketing education, welding, computerized manufacturing machining and electricity," she said. "But business and industry's biggest needs were in industrial maintenance."

That was a program Floyd had neither the money to fund nor room to place.

"But I did have the individual components that industry was looking for; a combination of electrical technology, machine tool and welding," she said.

Instead of thinking about what she couldn't do, Floyd focused on facing this challenge in a different way. In doing so, the school has created a pilot program that allows students enrolled in the electricity, computerized manufacturing machining and welding programs to earn a credit toward industrial maintenance certification.

"I don't think this has ever been done before, but tough economic times call for a little bit of innovation, and if I had brought on an industrial maintenance program with a new teacher, it would have competed with the existing programs I have," Floyd said. "So, actually this really was a better fit."

This pilot program is a direct result of Green County's involvement in the Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky (TRACK) initiative that couples the ATC with a business and industry partner to give students pre-apprenticeship credit while still in high school.

Murakami Manufacturing USA, located in nearby Campbellsville, is serving as the school's industry TRACK partner. The company is closely tied with the automotive industry creating the exterior mirror components for Toyota and Lexus vehicles.



Green County ATC Principal Linda Floyd and Murakami Manufacturing USA President Michael Rodenberg at the company's Campbellsville facility.

Murakami President Michael Rodenberg said he visited the Green County ATC's satellite robotics program located at Campbellsville University and realized his company had an array of obsolete parts that could be useful to the program.

That donation of parts, worth \$90,000, will enable students to continue their work in robotics, which is an extension of the electricity program at the Green County ATC.

"I'm a big believer in developing local talent, and if you can develop the students locally they are going to stay," Rodenberg said. "What Ms. Floyd is doing at the ATC is allowing us to eventually bring students into our organization and provide a career for the long term."

He added that many of the processes within his facility require knowledge in robotics, and that has been one component Green County ATC electricity instructor David Rauch has included in his curriculum as it relates to the industrial maintenance program.

"I get them hooked on the program with the robots," Rauch said.

Rodenberg also said that many areas within the Murakami facility require knowledge in many of the same areas taught in the career and tech centers.



Green County ATC electricity instructor David Rauch gets his students hooked on the program through innovative projects like robotics.

"It's not only electronics, but the mechanical side and the design side involving drafting," he said.

With these skills, students gain the capacity to become long-time employees.

"If you look at where the automotive industry is today within North America, it just continues to grow, and within this region there is a significant number of our customers who want

us to be close by," Rodenberg said. "So as we look forward to their growth, we hope to continue to grow, as well."

Rodenberg said the relationship between business/industry and education is critical in growing those businesses.

"We want to be an employer of choice in our area, and one way is to develop relationships with the school systems," he said. "There are a lot of aspects to this business that require different talents. If we can have those relationships with the schools and openly communicate with students to come see our facility with some of these apprenticeship opportunities, we think that will help us in the long run to become that employer of choice, which is one of our goals as an organization."

Rodenberg said that reaching students at the high school level and having them work through something like the pre-apprenticeship program will give them a feel for something they may want to do as a career.

Green County Schools Superintendent James Frank said the big picture involves bringing more industry to the area, and recognizing and using CTE can be a big factor in doing so.

“We also realize there are jobs out there waiting for these students, and we’re trying to figure out a way to prepare them for these jobs,” he said. “We hear every day from industry leaders that there are jobs (available) that are going unfilled, so we want to do what we can to prepare students for that. We think we have everything in place to do so.”

Frank said these new and existing programs at the ATC help meet these goals. Additionally, getting a solid foundation in CTE at the high school level is necessary to help meet industry demands. He also said that being involved in CTE at an even younger age is important.

“We’ve seen the importance of reaching the 8th graders, we’re trying right now to do that, and I think that is where it has to start,” Frank said.

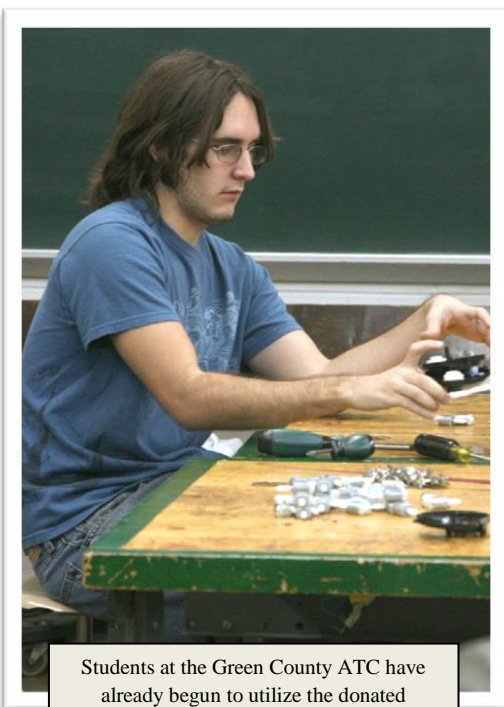
He emphasized that the kind of collaboration existing at the Green County ATC is important for the students both for those planning to attend college and those choosing a career path and overcoming old perceptions of what CTE is really all about is essential.



“I think our mindset has to get caught up with where we really are in these technology centers. It’s still on that old vocational setting, and it’s completely different from that now,” Frank said.

Donna Patterson, the instructional supervisor for Green County Schools, said one thing being done in their system to help change any old perceptions is a rotation program for freshmen, and soon for 8th graders, to spend time in each of the CTE classes. This will give them more time to decide what classes they like best.

“Now (students) have three-and-a-half-week rotations when those teachers can sell the programs and inform them of what the programs are all about; how high level these programs really are; and the amount of math and science that’s really involved with it,” she said. “The students, as well as parents, are learning earlier that the ATC is no longer that same vocational school that we all grew up with; they are advancing with the times.”



Students at the Green County ATC have already begun to utilize the donated components in the electricity class.

Patterson also said she thinks an intentional focus needs to be maintained on continually changing those old opinions.

The Green County ATC not only serves its home county but also students from neighboring Taylor County and the Campbellsville Independent school districts.

Roger Cook is the superintendent for Taylor County Schools. He said the value of CTE is apparent.

“I think it is more important than at any time in years past that we get students ready for careers,” he said. “This is my 38th year of education, and it seems like we’ve always concentrated on the college bound more than we have getting our students who don’t go to college, ready for life.”

Cook added that getting a start at the high school level is beneficial to students and that a lot of the career jobs pay more money than with the professional licenses.

“It depends on what you get prepared for especially if you get into the computer aided workforce,” he said.

Cook said his district has had four straight years without any student dropouts and to do that, you have to provide them with studies in areas in which they are interested. His viewpoint is to tailor the students’ education to what they are interested in, thus lessening dropout problems and potentially increasing career readiness. Floyd also has worked with the Taylor County Economic Development Authority (TCEDA) in bringing awareness to the programs at the ATC.

TCEDA Executive Director Ron McMahan has worked with Floyd to help start a satellite robotics program so Taylor County and Campbellsville Independent students may take advantage of the program offering at an earlier age without having to travel to the ATC. Currently, freshmen in those two school districts can’t attend the ATC due to scheduling issues that prevent more than one CTE elective.

“So we brought the program to them,” Floyd said

Because it’s a neutral satellite, Campbellsville University is providing the space, and TCEDA helped with the robotics components as well as the software and computer needs.

McMahan said by getting the students involved early, the goal is to get them to stay in that type of a program as juniors and seniors or even beyond.

“The TRACK program is a great model to get high school students involved in an area that could prove to be a lifelong career for them, and hopefully their careers will be spent in our community business and industry sectors,” he said.

Floyd said she is excited about the prospects for the students at her school, especially with the support the school has received from educational and industry leaders.

“It’s amazing what good things can happen when we work together,” she said. “The collaboration between our existing programs, our school districts’ superintendents and our area industries has produced opportunities that will benefit our students for a lifetime.”